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ABSTRACT

Noting that kindergarten entry is an exciting time requiring adjustments for children and their parents, this Smart Start brochure gives parents ideas on how to help their children be successful in school and what to expect when school starts. The brochure defines readiness and offers suggestions for parents to help their children develop in the following areas: (1) health and physical development; (2) social and emotional development; (3) approaches to learning; (4) communication; and (5) thinking and general knowledge. Suggestions for helping children be successful learners include listening and talking to the child, asking the child open ended questions, showing interest in their child's school or child care, reading to the child, and limiting television. The cutoff date for North Carolina school entry is noted, and required documents for school enrollment are listed. Information on ways schools can help children feel at ease upon school entry is delineated. Materials parents should see in a kindergarten classroom are listed and learning centers are described. The brochure also delineates ways parents can help their children make a smooth transition to kindergarten and includes tips for helping families have a good kindergarten experience. (KB)

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PROGRAM SERVICES PAPER

ED 472 190

SCHOOL READINESS: STARTING YOUR CHILD OFF RIGHT

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So your child is starting kindergarten soon! This is an exciting time, but it can be scary too. You may have questions about whether your child is ready to go to school, or you may be wondering how you can help him get off to a good start. This brochure gives parents ideas on how to help their child be successful in school and what to expect when school starts.

WHAT IS READINESS?

"Readiness" is what we call the things that help children be successful in school. However, readiness is not just about children. It has two parts: the skills and abilities children have *and* the readiness of the school to meet the needs of the individual child.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT READINESS AND CHILDREN?

- All children are born ready to learn. Children begin to learn as soon as they are born, and they keep learning every day.
- Readiness is not an event that happens at a certain time, like when a child enters preschool or starts kindergarten. It is a process that begins when your child is born and continues as he learns from experiences with the things and people in his world.

- Every part of your child's development is important and will help her learn. There are some things that are especially important for success in school.

Here are some aspects of your child's development that are important for success in school and some things you can do to help your child develop and grow in this area:

1. HEALTH AND PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

All the things that contribute to good health help children have the energy and concentration to do well in school. You can help by:

- Making sure your child eats a healthy diet.
- Making sure that your child gets adequate rest and has a regular bedtime schedule.
- Taking your child for regular physical check-ups.
- Making sure your child gets needed immunizations.
- Making sure your child has many chances to use his large/gross motor skills by running, jumping, climbing steps and other activities like these.
- Making sure your child has many chances to use her small/fine muscle skills by using crayons, cutting with child size scissors, sculpting with play dough and other similar activities.

2. SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Feeling good about yourself and others is important to learning. Children who are confident about their abilities and who like being with others will probably enjoy being in school and work hard there. You can help by:

- Making sure your child has many chances to be with other children, both in groups and one-on-one.
- Encouraging your child to practice skills like following directions, remembering stories and taking turns.
- Giving your child tasks to do that she can do well and learn to feel confident in her abilities. Offer praise and encouragement for tasks completed.
- Helping him learn to dress himself and manage his own personal needs.
- Having regular routines at home and being consistent so he can understand that these are important.

3. APPROACHES TO LEARNING

How your child learns is important. Children who are successful in school enjoy learning. You can help by:

- Offering your child chances to explore things he is interested in and encouraging your child to ask questions and develop a sense of curiosity.
- Giving your child jobs to do and encouraging her to finish them. Make sure to notice her work and praise her for doing a good job.
- Giving him opportunities to be creative.
- Giving her the chance to use basic problem-solving skills.
- Helping him take responsibility for his learning by asking him what he thinks or how he feels about his work or play.

4. COMMUNICATION

Communicating clearly with others is important. You can help by:

- Listening to your child.
- Encouraging your child to listen when others talk.
- Making sure your child has many chances to draw, scribble, and write using different tools such as pencils, crayons, markers and paint brushes.
- Telling your child stories and listening as she tells stories.
- Encouraging your child to tell you and others what he needs.
- Helping your child learn to accept limits and rules. Make your expectations clear and be consistent with rules.

5. THINKING AND GENERAL KNOWLEDGE

Children learn many things about the world before they go to school. You can help your child learn by:

- Taking your child many places. Trips within your city or neighborhood can be learning experiences.
- Giving your child the opportunity to listen to you read many different kinds of books.
- Offering your child materials to use that have patterns or relationships, like puzzles.

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How can Parents Help Children be Successful Learners?

Sometimes parents think they should teach their child letters and numbers before they begin kindergarten, but the best way to help your child prepare for school is to help her know how to learn.

- Listen to your child. This shows him that communication is important.
- Talk to your child. Language development is a key to successful learning. When you talk to your child while you do things, describe what you are doing and answer their questions. This encourages language development.
- Ask your child questions that do not have a one- or two-word answer. (Instead of asking, "Did you have a good time?" ask "What did you like about the park? Why?")
- Show interest in your child's school, preschool or child care center. There are many things parents can do to help. Some parents volunteer in the classroom. Others help in the lunchroom or on the playground. Your child's teacher can help you decide how you can help.
- Read to your child. Choose many different things to read, like favorite books, poems, factual books, and magazines. Reading is one of the best ways to help your child's language development and to help her enjoy and value books. This is important to success in school. Your library is a good place to find books.
- Take your child to different places. Experiences with the world can help your child form a good base of information she can use in school. Take your child to the grocery store, the car wash, or just for a walk around your neighborhood. Talk about what you see. Describe what is happening. Point out common words on signs. Little things can be an adventure for your child, and she can learn a lot as well.
- Limit television. Too much TV takes time away from other good activities that can help your child learn. Television does not help develop language skills. Choose programs carefully and limit watching to a maximum of one or two programs a day.
- Choose good child care. Good child care helps children be successful in school. In child care, children need to be in small groups with teachers who understand and like children. They need many different activities to choose from and many materials to use. This kind of high-quality care can help your child begin to develop needed skills like getting along with others, listening, and following directions.
- Set limits for your child and stick to them. Setting limits helps children feel secure because they know what to expect and helps them learn to follow rules.
- Help your child learn to listen by using position words like "up", "down", and "beside" when you talk to him and by giving him one-, two- or three-part directions to follow. (For example, "Please brush your teeth and put on your pajamas" or "Please put away your coat, wash your hands, and sit at the table so we can have lunch."

How do I Know if my Child is Ready?

Schools use birth date to decide when children will enter school. **In North Carolina, if a child is five on or before October 16, he is eligible for school.** Every child develops at his own rate. Abilities and skills can develop unevenly even in the same child. For example, one child may talk early and walk later, while another child the same age may walk early and talk later. There is no magic date when children are "ready." Helping your child do some of the things listed in this brochure will make adjusting to school easier.

Children who have an easier adjustment to school

- Can communicate their needs, wants and thoughts;
- Can take turns and share;
- Are enthusiastic and curious; and
- Can sit still and pay attention for short periods of time.

How can I Tell if my School is Ready?

Schools need to be ready for children, too. "Ready schools" that help children be successful have things in common you can look for.

Ready schools make children and families feel safe and welcome. Children learn best when they are comfortable. Here are some ways schools can help your child feel at ease.

- Someone - a teacher, an aide or other school staff - is there to welcome you and your child when you come to school.
- Teachers kneel down when they talk to children so that they are on the child's eye level. They talk to your child—not just to you.
- Parents are welcome to spend time at school. The school offers places where you can feel comfortable, like a parent's lounge, resource center or in the classroom.
- The school is kept clean and attractive.
- The school reflects the make-up of the community through the artwork and books it displays so that all children can recognize something of their own home culture.

In North Carolina, you will need the following to enroll your child in school:

- A birth certificate showing your child turns five on or before October 16
- A Kindergarten Assessment Report (a physical signed by a doctor)
- A shot record from a doctor or health department. These are the required shots:
  - Diptheria, Tetanus and acellular Pertussis (DTP-DtaP or DT)
  - Polio vaccine (IPV or OPV)
  - Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR)
  - Haemophilus Influenza (Hib)
  - Hepatitis B
- The school assigned to the neighborhood or communty in which you live.

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Your child learns best when she can use many materials in an active way. Here are some things you should see in a kindergarten classroom:

- The classroom has learning centers.
- The classroom has many books and other printed materials, placed where children can reach them without help.
- The classroom offers a variety of materials, like crayons, puzzles, and play dough. Materials are stored where children can reach them.
- There are times during the day when children can play and choose what they want to do.
- Children's work is displayed attractively at their eye level.
- The classroom has set aside space for quiet work and active work, and space for children to work together and independently.

Teachers can help children adjust to school by learning about the programs where children are enrolled before they come to school, learning about each child and her family, communicating with parents about what to expect once school starts, and inviting parents to visit the school on a regular basis.

What Is a Learning Center?

Good early childhood classrooms are usually set up so that there are areas in the room for different activities. Children should be able to choose an area and select and use materials on their own. There should be a variety of materials in each area that children can choose from. Each area should be clearly separated from other areas, and quiet areas should be separated from active ones. It is a good sign to see children interested in activities in learning centers.

Here are some common learning centers:

- A book or reading center
- A block center
- An art center
- A dramatic play center
- A science or discovery center
- A table games or puzzle center
- A music or listening center
- A writing center
- A math center

TRANSITIONS

Transitions are changes. Your child's experience as she moves from preschool or home to kindergarten is an important transition. A smooth transition to kindergarten can help make sure your child is successful in school. Here are some things you can do to help make sure your child experiences a good transition:

- Talk with you child about the change and the new school.
  - o Tell him he is growing up and you are proud of him.
  - o Say positive things about this new experience.
  - o Make sure she knows how it will be different from her old one.
  - o Tell stories about what school is like.
- Let your child talk about her questions or fears. Tell her that everyone has questions when they make a change.
- Practice some of the skills and routines he will need when he begins school. This will help him be comfortable with a new environment.
  - o Talk with your child's teacher to find out what routines are like in the kindergarten classroom.
  - o Role-play routines like eating in the lunchroom and managing his belongings.
  - o Practice habits like packing lunches, laying out clothes, and putting materials in one place so they will be easy to find.
- Read books about starting school.

How do Schools find out about Children's Readiness?

Parents are important. You know your child better than anyone else. You know important things about him, such as the kinds of experiences he has had before starting school, what his health is like, and what your family is like. Every child begins school with an individual mix of things they know and experiences they have had. All children learn in different ways. Sharing information about your child can help teachers and others at your school know how best to teach him.

What should we Do to Prepare for School?

Here are some tips that will help your family have a good kindergarten experience:

Before school starts:

- Find out what school the children from your neighborhood attend.
- Visit the school.
- Find out what choices you may have for where your child attends school (such as magnet schools).
- Find out what the registration process is and how it works.
- Several months before school starts, find out what papers you will need and get them together (for example, your child's shot record).
- Go to any orientation meeting your school has for new parents.
- Take your child to visit the school, and meet her new teacher before the first day of school.
- Find out about transportation, and make sure your child knows how he will get to and from school.
- Your school may screen your child to help them know her better. It is important to remember that a screening is not a test. Screenings help find any problems your child may have so that she can get help with them right away.

When school starts:

- If your child is in child care or Head Start, see if the teacher who knows your child best can talk to the kindergarten teacher to tell her what your child likes and what she is learning before she comes to school.
- Talk with your child's kindergarten teacher about what they will be doing in school and what to expect.
- If you need somewhere for your child to go after school is over, check to see if the school has an after school program.

During the school year:

- Keep in touch with your child's teacher after school starts—write notes, call or visit regularly so you can talk with the teacher and let her know you want to be involved in the learning process.
- Keep a journal or folder of your child's work.

School readiness is a complex process. By following the suggestions in this brochure you can help your child get a good start in school, and build a foundation for learning that will last throughout his school years.

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